

## A Balanced Prayer

Text: III John

**Introduction:** For quite a while I've read the Bible through each year. In doing that, I have found that reading through a variety of versions like the Jerusalem Bible, and paraphrases like the Message to be very invigorating. For instance verse 2 of third John reads this way in Phillip's paraphrase, "***My heartfelt prayer for you, my very dear friend, is that you may be as healthy and prosperous in every way as you are in soul.***" Eugene Peterson translates the Greek in what he calls "street language" so he renders this verse in these words, "***The pastor, to my good friend Gaius: How truly I love you! We're the best of friends, and I pray for good fortune in everything you do, and for your good health—that your everyday affairs prosper, as well as your soul.***"

**Don't dismiss short letters in your study of the Bible.**

III John is the 64th book in the Bible. It has the fewest Greek letters and words of any of the 66 books. In verse two of this brief book we are offered what I like to call. "A Balanced Prayer." Prayer is a big ticket item in the Bible. The longest book in the Bible is really a prayer book, i.e. the Book of Psalms. I read this week that even when Jesus was being baptized he was praying.

**Let's look at four requests in this short book.**

- A prayer for reasonable health. It is such a joy to be able to walk. Several years ago I had a bout with gout. It stopped me in my tracks. Even to walk across the street before the light changed on Market Street was a struggle. My heart goes out to people who are unable to walk. What blessings are found in talking, seeing, hearing, playing, working, and eating. Jesus went about healing all manner of diseases. The first century church planter taught us that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. He saw some profit in exercise and spoke of moderation in diet and drink. I want to pray for my friends that they might enjoy blissful sleep, adequate nutrition, and periods of recreation. But why? "Isn't that being selfish?" NO! NO! NO!

Much of the mission and ministry of Christ's kingdom requires energy. The commendation extended to the Thessalonian church included their "***work of faith,***" (ergos=acts generated by faith), and their "***labor of love*** (topas=toil propelled by love.) The Great Commandment of God calls us to "***Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your STRENGTH.***" Deut.6:5

- A Prayer for adequate resources.

Jesus said his followers are blessed if they are "poor in Spirit," But that doesn't mean they have to be "dirt poor" financially. Some are stationed in life to experience poverty such as the man who sat at the rich man's gate. He had to wrestle with the dogs for the garbage from the table. He was God's test to the rich man as to his lack of compassion

for human needs. What an extravagant gift from the poor widow! Even the apostle Paul experienced poverty at times. But there are a number of saints who enjoyed great wealth. Abraham, the thrice mentioned “friend of God” was able to arm 318 of his servants for battle.” The income of kings David and Solomon stagger the imagination. Sometimes it’s not the cost of living, but the cost of high living. I want to pray for you who are in financial bondage. Some of us need “plastic surgery.”

But again, the Question is Why? Why should I pray that you have financial resources? It comes back again to the “Kingdom of God.” It is not a selfish prayer. Gaius appears to have been wealthy. It appears he had the spiritual gift of hospitality. He used his discretionary funds to support the traveling preachers. I believe that John was touched by that because he remembered when Jesus sent him out to do mission work without a wallet (not even a credit card.) See Matthew 10:9-10 “no gold, or silver or copper coins in your money belt.” Look to the “worthy ones to supply your need.”

- A Prayer for increased spirituality.

Notice the “even as your soul is getting along well.” The prosperity of your life includes a stronger prayer life, a closer walk with God, an understanding of Christ’s claims upon your time, testimony and service. I would be doing you a disservice to pray that you “might be rich and fit” if I do not include “in proportion to your spiritual growth.” Paul places material increase as subordinate to spiritual increase. II Cor. 4:16 Jesus was somewhat harsh when he said “What shall a man gain, if he should gain the world and lose his own soul?” He said, that a person does not live on bread alone, but upon every word that comes from the Father.

Why should I want you to progress spiritually? I’ve watched many talented people succeed in theater, music, sports, television, technology, finance and yes in church life. Sometimes they burst on the scene like a rocket, but in a short space of time burn out just as quickly. The question asked is “Can you endure?”

- A prayer for godly examples, i.e. mentors

There are three people that John picked out as members of the small congregation somewhere in Asia Minor, perhaps Pergamon. Gaius—an open heart and an open home.

Demetrius—an example of a person whose life was one of integrity and good will. Diotrophes—an egotist, an elitist, the one who aspired to be “top dog.” What kind of man would try to keep the beloved apostle from coming to church? Perhaps John was so severe with Diotrophes because as an apostle he argued to be first, he had a hot temper, he wanted to call fire down from heaven when unauthorized people sought to serve God. Your future will be shaped by your decisions. Choose solid, growing, joyful productive Christians and inspiring books to read.

Why do you need to be wise in the area of church life? Because of what I call “polarization.” Pockets of people who by family, friendship, favors choose to support an unworthy leader. John also knew that it was so dumb to make yourself preeminent

when Jesus alone deserves that spot. It is Jesus who gives forgiveness, provision, abiding love, promises, and power. "Without Him we can do nothing that is eternal or spiritual. Swing open the door of your life and begin to sense His presence.

I love the song, "**Just a closer with Thee**" written by the famous writer anonymous.

*I am weak, but thou art strong,  
Jesus keep me from all wrong,  
I'll be satisfied as long--As I walk, let me walk close to thee.  
Just a closer walk with thee, Grant it Jesus is my plea,*

*Daily walking close to thee,*

*Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.*